PTV break 231-year-old record to defend lowest first-class total

KARACHI: Pakistan Television broke a 231-year-old record for the lowest total successfully defended in first-class cricket when Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Limited failed to chase down a paltry target of 40 in the President's Trophy on Saturday.

The defending champions shot SNGPL for a paltry 37 to win the match by a mere two runs on day three of the four-day game.

The previous record, set by Oldfield when they successfully defended a target of 41 against the Marylebone Cricket Club to secure a win by six runs at the Lord's Old Ground, had stood since August 1794.

"I am delighted with my team's world record effort," PTV's head coach Mohammad Waseem told AFP. "My team's motto is to never give up, fight till the last ball. This is the not the first time, we have won all our three matches coming from well behind by remaining positive in all situations."

SNGPL, whose head coach is former Pakistan Test skipper Misbah-ul-Haq with another former captain Azhar Ali their batting coach, had taken a 72-run lead in the first innings after PTV folded for 166, and looked set for an easy win when their opponents posted only 111 in their second innings.

But, with the pitch at the National Bank Stadium deteriorating on the third day, batters fell in quick succession and left-arm spinner Ali Usman wreaked havoc with six wickets for nine runs, while pacer Amad Butt took four for 28 — the only two bowlers used in their second innings.

The star-studded SNGPL batting led by Pakistan Test captain Shan Masood were bowled out in 19.4 overs with just one batter Saifullah Bangash crossing double figures with 14.

Shan was out without scoring while Test players, Mohammad Ali made six and spinner Sajid Khan just three. Pakistan's international players Omair Bin Yousuf made six and Abdul Samad five.

In other action at the President's Trophy, Oil and Gas Development Company Limited put Sahir Associates under pressure, Khan Research Laboratories neared a win against State Bank of Pakistan while Wapda's tie with Ghani Glass hung in the balance.

Sahir Associates led OGDCL by 138 runs after they reached stumps at the KCCA Stadium with 147-8 on the board in their second innings.

OGDCL posted 257 in their first innings before their spinners Danish Aziz, Jawad Ali and Asif Afridi ripped through Sahir Associates' line-up with two wickets apiece despite some resistance from Mohammad Faiq (48) and Ahmar Ashfaq (43).

SBP continued to pay for their massive first-innings deficit as despite reaching 289-9 in their second innings, they led KRL by a mere 27 runs at the SBP Sports Complex. KRL pacer Ahmed Ashir picked up 5-80 to put his side on the brink of victory.

Chasing 243 to win, Wapda reached the close of play at 108-5 against Ghani Glass at the UBL Sports Complex. Noman Ali picked up all five wickets for Ghani Glass, who closed their second innings at 323. —Agencies

DACIA'S Nasser Al-Attiyah celebrates after winning the car category of the Dakar Rally on Saturday.—Reuters

Al-Attiyah claims sixth Dakar car crown as Benavides triumphs on two wheels

YANBU: Qatar's Nasser Al-Attiyah won the Dakar Rally in Saudi Arabia for the sixth time in the car category on Saturday with Argentina's Luciano Benavides scraping home by two seconds to claim the bike title, the narrowest margin ever.

Al-Attiyah, with Belgian co-driver Fabian Lurquin, had led overnight after taking his 50th career stage win and made no mistakes as he handed Romanian car manufacturer Dacia a first victory at their second attempt in the two-week event held entirely in Saudi Arabia.

The 55-year-old Qatari also won in 2011, 2015, 2019, 2022 and 2023 with four different manufacturers.

"We've worked very hard since last year," he said after the final 13th stage. "This is my sixth victory, I still need to break Peterhansel's record." Frenchman Stephane Peterhansel, still competing for Defender in the Stock category, won eight car titles and six on motorcycles.

Ford's Nani Roma finished second overall, nine minutes and 42 seconds behind, and teammate Mattias Ekstrom was third after winning the final stage.

Last year's winner Yazeed Al-Rajhi of Saudi Arabia withdrew in the opening week after mechanical problems.

Al-Attiyah won two stages with Ekstrom taking the most — four including the prologue.

Benavides had earlier taken the motorcycle title after American Ricky Brabec lost his way and saw victory slip through his fingers.

The KTM rider, whose older brother Kevin won the Dakar in 2021 and 2023, came home second in the 105-km stage in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea port of Yanbu, with Honda's overnight leader Brabec 10th.

In a gruelling endurance event spanning two weeks and 8,000 km over rocky roads, through canyons and vast expanses of desert dunes, twice winner Brabec blew his chances with only a few kilometres remaining.

Spaniard Tosha Schareina finished third overall for Honda.

"I've dreamed of this moment my whole life," said the winner. "Even yesterday, it seemed impossible, but I still felt it could happen, and today Ricky took the wrong line and I took the right one.

"It was a glimmer of hope. I saw it was him and that he had to pull a U-turn to get back on the right line because crossing between the two was impossible. I saw the opening and I went for it."

Lithuania's Vaidotas Zala took his first title in the trucks category, dethroning Martin Macik of the Czech Republic who ended up fourth. American Brock Heger won the SSV race.—Agencies

Bangladesh reiterates its request to ICC to relocate T20 World Cup matches

DHAKA: The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) has had "constructive" discussions with the International Cricket Council over moving their Twenty20 World Cup matches from India to Sri Lanka, the country's governing body said on Saturday.

Uncertainty looms over Bangladesh's participation in the Twenty20 World Cup following an earlier request by the BCB to the ICC to move their World Cup matches out of India over safety concerns amid political tensions.

Bangladesh are in World Cup Group 'C' and will play West Indies, England and Italy in Kolkata before facing Nepal in Mumbai.

The February 7-March 8 tournament will be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka.

BCB and ICC officials met in Dhaka on Saturday.

"During the discussions, the BCB reiterated its formal request to the ICC to relocate Bangladesh's matches to Sri Lanka," the BCB said in a statement.

"The Board also shared the Bangladesh government's views and concerns on safety and security of the team, Bangladeshi fans, media and other stakeholders."

Tensions have heightened in recent weeks between Hindu-majority India and Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Hundreds protested near Bangladesh's High Commission in New Delhi last month after a Hindu factory worker was beaten and set on fire in Bangladesh's Mymensingh district over allegations of blasphemy.—Reuters

NONTHABURI (Thailand): Pakistan's Azwa Chaudhry vies for the ball with Fathimath Saliya of the Maldives during their SAFF Women's Futsal Championship match at the Nonthaburi Stadium on Saturday. Azwa scored the opener before goals by captain Kayanat Bokhari and Anmol Hira secured a 3-1 win for Pakistan, the second in a row after their victory over Sri Lanka in the previous match. It took Pakistan top of the table with seven points from three games, a point ahead of India. The team that finish top of the standings after six matches will be crowned champions.—Courtesy SAFF

MANCHESTER: Patrick Dorgu of Manchester United shoots to score during the Premier League match against Manchester City at Old Trafford on Saturday.—AFP

United hurt City title hopes as Spurs flop again

LONDON: Michael Carrick's Manchester United beat Manchester City 2-0 on Saturday, dealing a huge blow to their neighbours' title hopes, as sorry Tottenham Hotspur slipped to defeat against relegation-threatened West Ham United.

Liverpool were held to a 1-1 draw by lowly Burnley while Liam Rosenior celebrated his first league win in charge of Chelsea.

The early result at a bouncing Old Trafford left Pep Guardiola's City six points behind Arsenal, who could extend their lead when they visit struggling Nottingham Forest in the late kick-off match.

Former United midfielder Carrick was the man in the hot seat after being appointed as manager of the Red Devils until the end of the campaign following the sacking Ruben Amorim.

Carrick, who was also briefly United's caretaker manager in 2021, said ahead of his first game that there was still "magic" at United and his team put on a memorable show on home turf.

Second-half goals from Bryan Mbeumo and Patrick Dorgu capped a dominant display by United, who have had to play second fiddle to neighbours City for more than a decade.

The home side also had three goals ruled out for offside, while Gianluigi Donnarumma was inspired in City's goal.

"Great start. No getting away from that," said Carrick. "The boys were fantastic."

"Consistency is the key to any success," he added. "If you could find that, then you're onto a winner. That's our challenge — we've got to find a way to do that. Big one next week obviously (against Arsenal), another tough one, but on the back of today, we've got a good foundation."

Guardiola admitted that his team — winless in four league games this year — were outplayed by Carrick's inspired United.

"The better team won," said the City boss. "We weren't at the level required to win this game. In many departments, we weren't there. They were better. They had an energy we didn't have."

The mood at Tottenham darkened further after Spurs slipped to a 2-1 defeat against West Ham, who had not won a Premier League match since early November.

Crysencio Summerville put the away side ahead in the 15th minute with a deflected strike past Guglielmo Vicario.

Cristian Romero headed home Pedro Porro's cross from the right in the second half to level but substitute Callum Wilson grabbed a stoppage-time winner — sparking loud boos at the Tottenham Hotspur Stadium.

Spurs have now won just two of their league games at home this season, leaving manager Thomas Frank, in his first campaign in charge, under huge pressure.

Defending champions Liverpool are now unbeaten in 12 games in all competitions but dropped two valuable points against lowly Burnley at Anfield.

Germany midfielder Florian Wirtz scored his third Premier League goal of the season but the visitors improved in the second half and drew level in the 65th minute when Marcus Edwards placed his shot beyond the reach of Alisson Becker.

Chelsea boss Rosenior, who replaced the departed Enzo Maresca this month, watched as his side saw off high-flying London rivals Brentford 2-0.

Joao Pedro gave the Blues the lead in the first half and Cole Palmer doubled the advantage from the spot in the 76th minute.

Sunderland beat Crystal Palace 2-1 while Leeds United scored late to beat Fulham 1-0.—AFP

India beat BD at U-19 World Cup, SL break records in Japan rout

BULAWAYO: Off-spinner Vihaan Malhotra took four wickets to help India make a stunning comeback and beat Bangladesh by 18 runs in their rain-affected Group 'B' match of the ICC U-19 World Cup at the Queens Sports Club in Bulawayo on Saturday.

This was India's second consecutive victory in the event.

Chasing 165 off 29 overs in a rain-curtailed game, Bangladesh in a dramatic turnaround collapsed for 146 in 28.3 overs. At one stage they were 106-2 in the 22nd over and looked strong favourites to win the game.

Skipper Azizul Hakim top-scored with a fighting 51 off 72 balls with the help of four fours and a six but the effort proved insufficient in the end for Bangladesh. Opener Rifat Beg (37 off 37) was the other major scorer.

Malhotra was the wrecker-in-chief with impressive figures of 4 for 14 in four overs.

Interestingly, after avoiding handshakes at the toss amid the ongoing tensions between India and Bangladesh, players of both the teams completed the traditional custom after the game.

Earlier, opener Vaibhav Suryavanshi slammed 72 off 67 while wicket-keeper/batter Abhigyan Kundu made 80 off 112 as India, after being asked to bat first, posted 238 off 48.4 overs.

Suryavanshi, 14, became the youngest player to score a fifty in the U-19 World Cup history, and also surpassed Virat Kohli in the list of players with the most runs in youth ODIs. For Bangladesh, pacer Al Fahad took five wickets for 38 runs in 9.2 overs.

In a Group 'A' match, Sri Lanka created two tournament records as they outclassed Japan by 203 runs at the Namibia Cricket Ground in Windhoek.

After being put into bat first, Sri Lanka amassed 387-4 off their 50 overs and then restricted their opponents to 184-8 to win their first match of the event.

Sri Lankan openers Viran Chamuditha (192) and Dimantha Mahavithana (115) laid the foundation for the huge win with a 328-run stand — the biggest partnership for any wicket in the event's history — in 43.5 overs.

The previous record was held by England players Dan Lawrence (174) and Jack Burnham (148) who added 303 runs for the second wicket against Fiji at the 2016 U-19 World Cup in Chittagong.

The second record — of the highest-ever individual score by a player in a U-19 World Cup — was claimed by 17-year-old Chamuditha who smashed 26 fours and a six during his 143-ball innings. The left-hander broke the record of compatriot Hasith Boyagoda who smashed 191 against Kenya in the 2018 edition.Mahavithana cracked 11 fours in his 125-ball knock.—Agencies

AREGENTINA'S Luciano Benavides celebrates after winning the Dakar Rally motorcycle title on Saturday.—AFP

World number ones Alcaraz, Sabalenka target Australian Open glory

MELBOURNE: Carlos Alcaraz launches his bid for a career Grand Slam on Sunday "hungry" for an elusive Australian Open title, while Aryna Sabalenka is laser-focused on clinching a third Melbourne crown.

The first major of the year gets under way as a 15-day event for the third time running, aimed at cutting down on late-night finishes.

Top seed Alcaraz is desperate to win it, having failed to go past the quarter-finals in four previous trips to Australia.

The title is the only one missing from his major collection, which currently consists of two French Opens, two US Opens and two Wimbledons. "This is my main goal for this year," Alcaraz, who gets under way in the night match on Rod Laver Arena against home player Adam Walton, said. "I'm just hungry for the title, hungry to do a really good result here."

He has met the 79th-ranked Walton once before, at Queen's in London last year, when he won 6-4, 7-6 (7/4).

Should the 22-year-old complete the career Slam he would join an exclusive club as just the sixth man to win all four major titles after Andre Agassi, Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Rod Laver.

MELBOURNE: Venus Williams of the US attends a practice session ahead of the Australian Open on Saturday.—AFP

He would also become the youngest, surpassing Nadal, who was 24 at the time.

But he has a big roadblock in front of him, with Italy's Jannik Sinner the two-time defending champion and in peak physical condition.

Sinner, who beat Alexander Zverev in last year's final and went on to win Wimbledon, opens against France's Hugo Gaston, who he has met twice before but not since 2021.

"We worked a lot physically," Sinner said of his pre-season. "The physical part now is so, so important because the matches can get very long and also very intense. "You have to be at the top physical level as long as you can."

Assuming he gets that far, Sinner could meet 10-time champion Djokovic in the semi-finals before a potential clash with Alcaraz for the title.

Djokovic would surpass Margaret Court as the outright Slam leader on 25 titles should he turn back the clock and upstage his younger rivals.

He has a tricky opener against Spain's Pedro Martinez.

GRAND SLAM RECORD

A defiant Djokovic is adamant he can still beat any player on his day but at 38 the Serb is no longer focusing on the Grand Slam record.

"There has been a lot of talk about the 25th, but I try to focus myself on what I have achieved, not what I'm possibly achieving. I mean, I hope it comes to that, but 24 is also not a bad number," he told reporters at Melbourne Park on Saturday.

"I have to appreciate that and remind myself of the amazing career I had. And also release some of that unnecessary pressure."

Zverev, in the same half of the draw as Alcaraz, is also in action on Sunday against Canadian Gabriel Diallo.

World number 10 Alexander Bublik takes on American Jenson Brooksby.

Sabalenka will be bidding to continue her incredible record in hard court Grand Slam tournaments when she begins her campaign against Frenchwoman Rakotomanga Rajaonah, preceding Alcaraz onto Rod Laver Arena.

The Belarusian world number one has reached the final of the last six majors she has played on the surface, winning four of those.

She enters the competition in fine form after retaining her Brisbane International title this month without losing a set, and should have little trouble when she takes on the 118th-ranked Rakotomanga Rajaonah.

Sabalenka went into last year's final aiming to become the first woman since Martina Hingis to win three consecutive Australian Opens but was was stunned by Madison Keys.

Keys failed to really kick on from clinching a maiden Grand Slam and is in Australia as the ninth seed.

She will need to improve after clocking up nearly 50 unforced errors in her early exit at the warm-up Adelaide International.

She meets debutant Oleksandra Oliynykova of Ukraine and could face Jessica Pegula in the last 16 and Amanda Anisimova in the last eight.

Sabalenka's chief rival, six-time Grand Slam winner Iga Swiatek is, like Alcaraz, angling for a career Grand Slam in Melbourne. She will begin against Chinese qualifier Yuan Yue.

VENUS WILLIAMS IS BACK

Seventh seed Jasmine Paolini, 12th seed Elena Svitolina and veteran Venus Williams are also in action on Sunday.

Venus, a two-time Australian Open singles finalist, returns to the tournament for the first time since 2021 after receiving a wildcard.

The 45-year-old faces Olga Danilovic in the first round, where she is set to become the oldest woman to feature in the Australian Open main draw by surpassing Japan's Kimiko Date, who was 44 when she bowed out in the first round in 2015.

Williams has endured a poor start to the season, losing to Magda Linette in the first round in Auckland and to Tatjana Maria in her opening match at the Hobart International.

Despite her defeats, she said on said Saturday she was "up for the challenge".

"I'm super, super grateful for the opportunity from Tennis Australia. Grateful for the opportunity to play in front of the fans," she said. "I have just received so much support in the tournaments leading up, walking around the city and everything. My hope is to play my best."

A five-time Wimbledon champion, Williams was an Australian Open singles finalist in 2003 and 2017 and won the doubles title four times alongside sister Serena.

"This is the greatest place on Earth to play," she said. "I have had amazing memories here. I love challenges, so I'm up for the challenge."—Agencies